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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003498

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ZEBARI DOUBTS TURKISH MILITARY MOVE IMMINENT

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4
d/b.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In an October 18 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Zebari acknowledged the seriousness of border tensions with Turkey, but thought it unlikely that a Turkish cross-border operation (CBO) was imminent. Zebari confirmed that the GOI had authorized Iran to establish consulates in Erbil and Suleymanieh, but agreed to allow Embassy Baghdad to vet the names of the proposed staff. A clearly upset Zebari also reported that Prime Minister Maliki was deliberately stalling on releasing the USD 25 million the GOI pledged to assist Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. END SUMMARY.

BORDER TENSION

¶2. (C) The Foreign Minister opened by informing the Ambassador that Turkish Foreign Minister Babacan will not be coming to Baghdad as scheduled. The Ambassador urged Zebari to encourage Babacan to make the trip and Zebari agreed to raise the issue during a meeting with Turkish Ambassador Kanbay scheduled later in the day. Zebari acknowledged the seriousness of the border situation, which, he said, the House Armenian Genocide Resolution had made even worse. But he brushed aside the idea of an imminent CBO, reasoning that it would disrupt the Istanbul ministerial and mar Prime Minister Erdogan's upcoming visit to Washington. He pointed out that "mother nature"--the onset of winter--also made operations unlikely in the short-term. Zebari explained that the Kurdish populace would consider a CBO more as an attack on the KRG than on Iraq and warned that they were prepared to resist.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that a solution to the crisis depended on direct Kurd/Turkish dialogue and pushed for the GOI to move against PKK offices, movements, and financing. Both agreed that if GOI action did not change the situation's basic elements, a crisis would sooner or later occur. Zebari thought the GOI could take more effective measures against PKK elements whom he described as "terrorists and gangsters."

¶4. (C) Zebari repeated a familiar charge that the Turkish mission in Baghdad, and Ambassador Kanbay in particular, circumvented the Foreign Ministry in their dealings with the GOI. Zebari complained that the Turks refused to activate the tri-partite commission (Note: President Talabani and others have previously alleged this is because the Iraqi delegation to the commission includes Kurds. End Note) He said the Turks were reluctant to deal with the KRG directly on the issue. The Turks may prefer to deal with the GOI, and the KRG had to stand &behind the Iraqi flag8, but as a practical matter the KRG would have to be involved in any GOI discussion of the issue. Crocker agreed that it would be helpful if Turkish and Kurdish officials were in direct contact. Zebari closed by asking Ambassador Crocker to

mention to the Turks the need to also deal directly with the MFA on bilateral issues.

ISTANBUL MINISTERIAL

15. (C) The Ambassador said he would be visiting Iraq's neighbors in advance of the Istanbul ministerial. After the Foreign Minister reported there had been no GOI-GOT contact on the ministerial, the Ambassador strongly urged Zebari reach out to the Turkish side on all conference issues, particularly the communique. The Foreign Minister said he would cover these points during his afternoon meeting with Ambassador Kanbay.

IRANIAN CONSULATES

16. (C) Zebari confirmed that the GOI had approved Iran's request to establish consulates in the northern cities of Erbil and Suleymanieh, and told the Ambassador that Iran also wanted to establish one in the southern city of Najaf. Zebari mentioned that he had cautioned the Iranians both orally and in writing on the need to staff the posts with professional diplomats, not Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps officers. He said it was particularly important that the consul general be a diplomat, not an IRGC officer. These warnings reportedly made the Iranians "furious." Zebari agreed to share with the Embassy the names of the consulates' proposed staff for assistance in vetting.

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GOI UNHCR PLEDGE

17. (C) A visibly troubled Zebari told the Ambassador that the Prime Minister was deliberately stalling on releasing the USD 25 million the GOI pledged during a March UNHCR conference in Switzerland. Zebari said the decision was "political" and explained that Maliki considers Iraqi refugees to be mainly (Sunni) Ba'athist insurgents who should not receive assistance from the Iraqi state.

CROCKER